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Press Complaints Commission

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From the Chairman

The Rt Hon John Prescott MP
Office of the
Deputy Prime Minister
26 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2WH

Director

Tim Toulmin

23rd November 2005

Dear Mr Prescott

Thank you for your letter of 18 November which only reached me on Monday morning after its contents had already appeared in some newspapers on Sunday.

Let me deal with the issues you raise.

You will know, of course, that my book was submitted in the normal way to the Cabinet Office whose response was that the Government had no comments to make.

It is important to emphasise that the Commission consists of 17 members, ten of whom – the clear majority – are members of the public. Its decisions are made not by me alone, but by the PCC as a whole.

If the PCC receives a complaint related to the book, or otherwise involving me personally, I will follow the well-established practice applicable to all Commission members of not taking part in the consideration of any complaint where there is a real or perceived conflict of interest. Complainants can therefore be assured that their cases will be handled fairly and impartially.

I have already made it clear publicly that I have no intention of engaging in 'any future literary effort' involving the PCC or disclosing confidential matters relating to complaints.

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Sir John Major's underwear does not feature anywhere in my book. What is more, the scene concerned first appeared last year in the book "The Goldfish Bowl" by Cherie Booth and Cate Haste.

You say that the public will also have little confidence in my chairing the PCC impartially when they know that I have sat down and negotiated financial deals with the editors of newspapers I am supposed to regulate. But neither I nor my agent was involved in the negotiations about the serialisation rights. All such discussions were conducted by the publishers, specifically in order to avoid any conflict of interest arising on my part.

I made the decision to take no money personally from the serialisation. The proceeds will be given in three equal parts to three children's charities. Your reference to one of the charities which has received some of the proceeds of serialisation as being closely associated with my family gives a misleading impression. One of the charities, PACT, of which my wife is chief executive, will devote its share of the money to a project run jointly with the Police: the National Missing Persons Bureau, to be precise. The project is the development of the Missing Kids website, which enables the Police rapidly to disseminate images of children who go missing. PACT pays for the printing and distribution of posters downloaded from the website.

In light of the above, I do not believe that the contents of my book prevent me from acting as chairman of the PCC and interpreting the Code of Practice in accordance with past decisions of the Commission.

I intend to continue to carry out my duties as I have sought to discharge them in the last two and three-quarter years: impartially, independently and effectively.

I am sending a copy of this letter to The Press Standards Board of Finance, who are responsible for my appointment, and to members of the Commission.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted signature box]

Dictated by Sir Christopher Meyer
and signed in his absence

cc. Pressbof, PCC Commissioners